

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE**

**IASC PRINCIPALS BI-ANNUAL MEETING**

**SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION POINTS**

Geneva, 20 October 2021

## **Introduction**

Mr. Martin Griffiths, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and Chair of the IASC, convened the second IASC Principals bi-annual meeting for 2021 to discuss humanitarian situations in key countries; Accountability to Affected People (AAP), Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEA/SH); climate change; and the IASC strategic priorities for 2022-2023.

He observed that Principals had gathered at a key moment, as humanitarian needs are rising to unprecedented level. These challenges were compounded by the pandemic, the protracted nature of conflict and by the climate crisis which exacerbated inequalities and worsened vulnerabilities. In parallel, humanitarian financing was not keeping pace with the enormity of the humanitarian needs.

## **Country Contexts**

IASC Principals discussed key humanitarian crises and agreed on specific actions to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs on the ground. Their discussions specifically focused on the situations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Syria.

## **Accountability to Affected People (AAP)**

The ERC highlighted the importance of ensuring the system's accountability to affected people. He noted that despite all the commitments and tools, feedback from people affected by crises indicates how far the humanitarian system has still yet to go. He noted that AAP was on top of the list of issues that the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) raised at the HC retreat the previous week.

Mr. David Beasley, Executive Director of WFP, kicked-off the discussions by noting that AAP was central to the response, but that more needed to be done to empower affected people and for them to be self-sufficient. He noted that donor restrictions and short-term funding was a key obstacle to AAP, and that multi-year and flexible funding were essential. He stressed that Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) needed to do more to address the needs of affected people and integrate their feedback in the response. He stressed WFP's commitment in working with all members in this regard including through the work of the sub-group on collective AAP, which the WFP is co-leading with IFRC.

## Discussion

IASC members agreed that AAP was an important central priority to humanitarian action. They expressed that while there had been progress made, AAP was addressed differently by the various IASC members and that much more remained to be done. Principals underscored the importance of addressing the asymmetry of power which was at the heart of the challenges in addressing collective AAP.

IASC members recognized that as most of the system's response is in protracted crises situations, it was fundamental to focus attention on how the IASC can be more accountable and better engage with affected people in these contexts, including, by addressing the short-term nature of funding which challenges the system's ability to be more responsive to and engaging with affected people. In addition to noting the importance of HC and HCT leadership and accountability on AAP, IASC Principals underscored that engaging with local actors is a fundamental pillar in achieving better AAP. Against this backdrop, strengthened partnerships and collaboration with local NGOs and civil society who have more continuous engagement with communities is essential. They also highlighted the importance of data responsibility.

Principals recognized that a culture of humility of humanitarian actors as well as the necessity of trust between affected communities and humanitarians is central to the issue. In addition, they underscored the importance of participation of people in decisions about their own fate and future as essential to accountability. They reiterated the value for genuine participation of local and national actors and noted that there were opportunities with the Grand Bargain that need to be capitalized upon.

Principals also noted that there were opportunities to learn from efforts on PSEA and in public health emergencies, where collective and interagency approaches with dedicated capacity led to improved community engagement and more accountable interventions.

## Follow-up Actions

1. Issue an IASC statement on its commitment to the centrality of collective AAP. **[IASC Secretariat in consultation with ERC/IASC Principals]**
2. Communicate the importance of prioritizing AAP on the ground to HCs and HCTs and capture best practices. **[ERC and IASC Principals; IASC secretariat]**
3. Sub-Group on collective AAP co-Chaired by WFP and IFRC to share their recommendation on concrete steps to be taken to deliver on collective AAP. **[OPAG]**
4. Report annually on the impediments to deliver collectively on AAP and what needs to be done to address them. **[OPAG]**

## Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

The ERC noted that PSEA is on the top of his agenda. Despite recent media attention on DRC, he was concerned that sexual misconduct is occurring in many other contexts, that the system is not ahead of the curve on this issue, and that we need to do more and better to put an end to these violations. He noted the importance of striking a balance between

confidentiality and transparency to be able to tackle violations; the need for sustainable funding; the importance of ensuring that the right expertise and capacities were in place as some of the issues that need to be addressed. He thanked IASC Champions for their leadership in galvanizing the system in responding swiftly to tackle the myriad challenges because of SEA/SH.

The ERC invited Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of UNFPA and current IASC Champion on PSEA/SH, to brief members. Dr. Kanem reflected on the lasting harm that SEA inflicts on its victims, and the need for the IASC to do all that is possible to prevent and protect. She stressed the need for a greater understanding of accountability paradigms on the ground, particularly among HCs.

Dr. Kanem reported on progress during her 2021 Championship, focusing on bolstering in-country PSEA mechanisms, building a roster of trained PSEA coordinators for deployment to humanitarian and development settings, and the provision of dedicated experts to support the IASC secretariat. She stressed the importance of predictable funding to sustain support.

Dr. Kanem briefed members on the outcome of the final report of the IASC External Review on PSEAH, documenting collective progress over the past ten years. The report provides recommendations on thematic areas, including vision and leadership, victim-centered approaches, workplace culture, and community engagement. Some of the report's recommendations highlight that IASC stakeholders have struggled to articulate a medium to long term vision on PSEA/SH. Humanitarians have still not accepted that SEA is an inherent and operational management issue on par with security. Leaders and managers must recognize that monitoring and risk management should be ensured.

The review also found that coordination success is too contingent on effective leadership of individuals. A system should be in place that is not dependent on the skills and competence of a leader. There was demonstrably more commitment, knowledge, and consistent delivery from field leaders, clearly putting victims front and center. However, HCs expressed frustrations about lack of sustainable resources and the continuing reluctance of agencies to share information about allegations. Dr. Kanem also noted that victim services and referral pathways remain insufficient, unable to absorb additional needs. There is a continued lack of clarity on how cases should be pursued if the victim does not wish to participate in the investigation. Humanitarian teams will need to do more by sharing information appropriately, responding promptly to complaints, investigating satisfactorily, and providing services to victims.

Regarding workplace culture, the preliminary findings of the review found that RC/HCs felt if they broached the subject, it could jeopardize their relations with colleagues. They also asked for research to demonstrate linkages. Abusive power dynamics are often normalized in work culture. On community engagement, there is a need for more effective complaint mechanisms as local and national actors consistently describe challenges that victims face in reporting through existing systems, and the need for greater engagement with women's organisations.

Dr. Kanem invited IASC Principals to a round table with Member States and civil society on 23 November in Geneva, with the objective of securing agreements on how to implement recommendations from the review.

## Discussion

IASC members agreed with some of the findings of the review and that more needed to be done to ensure protection from abuse and strengthen victims' services. The issue of power dynamics between NGOs and the UN was also raised, with emphasis on the need to provide support and capacity sharing with local partners to prevent SEA more effectively. Members highlighted a need to make available predictable sustainable funding for in-country PSEA mechanisms and strengthen accountability tools.

IASC members expressed their willingness to engage, looking forward to robust recommendations from the review, in particular on resourcing. A clear multi-year plan of what activities should be funded and through what mechanism should be considered. Members agreed on the importance of engaged leadership. Leaders need to walk the talk and to speak often about expected behavior. Members also shared their experience in dealing with high profile, mediatized reports of SEA in their own organisations. In this regard, WHO spoke to the findings of the Independent Commission and investigations into SEA during the Ebola response in the DR Congo. A Management Response Plan to address systemic issues has been elaborated and will be shared for IASC Support. WHO is allocating funds to provide livelihood support to victims. While some members called for stronger action against perpetrators, IASC members overwhelmingly agreed that mindset change is required.

In closing, Dr. Kanem quoted a survivor as saying, "my living needs were fulfilled but my soul is in ruins", urging for action to keep in mind the lasting impacts these abuses can have.

## Follow-up Actions

1. Reconvene on 23 November under the auspices of the IASC Champion on PSEAH to consider concrete proposals from the IASC External Review. **[IASC Principals]**
2. Welcome the nomination of World Vision International, the incoming Chair of SCHR, as IASC Champion on PSEA/SH in 2022; Invite UN members to consider stepping forward with their nominations for the Championship role. **[IASC secretariat]**

## Climate Change

The ERC noted that the climate crisis was a present danger that should prompt all members to act now to address its impact. In this regard, he welcomed the Charter as an important initiative.

The ERC welcomed Mr. Jagan Chapagain, Secretary General of IFRC, to brief members on the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations (Charter).

In his introduction of the Charter, Mr. Chapagain noted that the humanitarian community had an important role to play in addressing the impacts of the climate crisis. The humanitarian community, as a sector, needed to be part of the solution in supporting vulnerable communities to prepare for, adapt and respond to the growing impacts of extreme weather events. Mr. Chapagain stressed that the growing urgency of the climate crisis required a collective resolve of the IASC to address growing and burgeoning humanitarian needs. He informed members that Charter, initiated jointly by IFRC and ICRC, aims to provide a clear vision and principles to guide humanitarian action in the face of the climate crisis. It was signed in May 2021 following a broad consultation process, including with IASC members. To date, some 160 humanitarian organizations had signed on, as well as the Swiss Government.

Mr. Chapagain explained that the objective of the Charter was to recognize the role of humanitarian actors in making a difference on the ground, including by setting organizational targets. Robert Mardini, Director-General of ICRC, thanked IASC members for supporting the development of the Charter. Mr. Mardini highlighted that conflict-affected communities in areas of ICRC's operations were facing the consequences of climate change, noting that the seven principles of the Charter guided signatories in translating intentions into action, by outlining their collective response, and maximizing their environmental sustainability.

## **Discussion**

With slow onset changes and extreme weather events, members underscored that climate change was both a humanitarian and development challenge. In addition to impact on communities – as it is the poor and most vulnerable that are the hardest hit – the climate crisis is forecasted to pose considerable threat to the global economy. Growing climate risks and declining economy will have a direct impact on increasing fragility, conflict, and the loss of productivity. The World Bank noted that approximately 216 million more people are projected to move due to the impact of the climate crisis. They noted that, according to recent research, ‘prevention always pays’ – with benefits in the order of \$4.2 trillion if we invest early in prevention and work with communities to green entire economies. The World Bank added that its efforts were aimed at creating economic opportunities, improving access to social services, and building natural capital environment and natural resources that were being degraded. Members were informed about the World Bank's climate change action plan for 2021-2025 which was aimed at not just greening projects, but greening entire economies. In this regard, the World Bank had launched country climate diagnostic development reports in 31 countries, including in countries with fragile and crisis situations, focusing on prevention and resilience.

There were calls to avoid creating islands of funding and that the IASC needed to come together to ensure a coherent approach to addressing the impact of the climate crisis, including with stepped up efforts around adaptation and mitigation. Members also referred to their own organizational climate initiatives, including to measure and change their carbon footprint, adapt programming, and change advocacy. In addition, they highlighted the importance of IASC members leveraging national policy initiatives, e.g., national climate strategies, when designing their programmes.

## Follow-up Actions

1. Encourage IASC members to sign the climate and environment charter. **[IASC members]**
2. Issue an IASC statement to inform the IASC's position on climate ahead of COP26. **[IFRC and ICRC in consultation with IASC members]**
3. Arrange a dedicated discussion to agree on concrete steps to be taken to address the climate crisis. **[IASC secretariat]**

## IASC Strategic Priorities for 2022-2023

The ERC noted the importance of agreeing to the IASC's Strategic Priorities for the 2022-2023 biennium period. He expressed his support for the following Strategic Priorities to continue to guide and frame the work of the IASC, namely: (a) operational response, (b) accountability and inclusion, (c) collective advocacy, (d) humanitarian-development collaboration and its linkages to peace, and (e) humanitarian financing.

He also expressed his support for the priority areas around which the IASC needed to focus its attention, namely: (i) humanitarian space (including access negotiations; impact of counter-terrorism legislation; and bureaucratic and administrative impediments) – as this was at the core of the IASC's work and featured prominently during the operational discussions earlier in the day. Without access, nothing happens, as such, humanitarian diplomacy to achieve access at the strategic and operational levels were essential; (ii) centrality of protection – more needed to be done to ensure that protection is better understood, prioritized, actioned, and funded; (iii) PSEA – continued to be a top priority until sexual misconduct is eradicated; and (iv) AAP and localization – as the bedrock and fundamental pillar in the response.

Equally, he urged the need to look at practical steps to: (a) better respond to the assistance and protection needs of the IDPs – particularly in light of the recommendations from the High Level Panel on Internal Displacement; (b) deliver concretely and practically on humanitarian-development collaboration – including on how the system can better collaborate with development actors on the provision of basic services; (c) address the impact of the climate crisis; (d) increase humanitarian funding and secure more quality and flexible funding to respond to the ever growing needs.

Regarding IASC structures, he noted the need to streamline structures and processes to ensure that the IASC was nimble and more responsive to the needs on the ground. He echoed members concerns that the IASC's Scale-Up Protocols needed to be examined closely to ensure that they were more effective. He welcomed the proposal to formalize the IASC Deputies Forum and requested that they consider the other subsidiary bodies (namely, the Results Groups and Reference Groups) to ensure that the IASC can deliver on its mandate.

## Discussion

There was general agreement among Members that the five existing strategic priorities should continue to frame the work of the IASC. While there was general agreement on the proposed priority areas of work, there were also strong calls to capitalize on the IASC as



the platform to tackle and address critical and strategic issues confronting the humanitarian action - and that these centered around the system's ability to respond in critical contexts such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, among others. As such, preserving humanitarian space, access negotiations, humanitarian diplomacy needed to be front and center. Specifically, on advocacy, there was a need to be more strategic and coordinated on when to be a common platform, when to have divergent messaging, and when it was important to balance private and public advocacy. Equally, members noted the importance of the IASC working coherently with the political, development and environmental pillars for a more informed and strategic humanitarian action.

IASC Principals shared reactions on a number of the priority areas. On humanitarian access, they noted that should not be limited to humanitarians accessing vulnerable communities but should be about the ability of affected communities to access humanitarian assistance and protection themselves. In this regard, there was a need to also strengthen humanitarian access in an increasingly contested environment, particularly by insisting on humanitarian privileges, including the independence of humanitarian action. Members also noted the importance of mitigating the impact of counter-terrorism legislation as well as addressing bureaucratic and administrative impediments which were on the rise. A suggestion was made to develop an advocacy strategy around preserving humanitarian space. The ERC informed members that OCHA was strengthening its capacity on access negotiations to support efforts to address this important priority. On Climate, there was a proposal to set-up an early warning system to alert the IASC to prepare and respond effectively. Furthermore, there was unwavering support to continue to prioritize PSEA as well as on the need to have greater attention on localization. A suggestion was also made on the need for the IASC to consider systemic inequalities in cities, particularly as the world was more urban today. Strengthening field support, including through the IASC's Peer-to-Peer project, the consistent use of cash, anticipatory action, gender equality, MHPSS and humanitarian financing also featured as areas of importance.

Regarding the Scale-Up protocols, members noted that the humanitarian system was slow in scaling up because of cumbersome processes and procedures. There was a need, therefore, to embark on efforts to harmonize and simplify processes and mechanisms more effectively. Equally, there was recognition of the need to reflect on the response to the COVID to equip the system to respond more effectively and timely to future pandemics – including by closely looking at the impact on local leadership as well as trust in the humanitarian sector.

Regarding IASC structures, members called for fewer and lighter structures and the need to balance the need to deliver and consultations on the issue. They welcomed the formalization of the IASC Deputies Forum to drive change on critical strategic issues. Members also welcomed proposals to further streamline and simplify structures, with some suggesting the Deputies Forum further consider options and carefully transitioning structures.

The ERC concluded by underscoring the importance of keeping attention and efforts on the strategic issues and, as such, the IASC needed to focus on the absolute priorities. Part of these efforts would entail stepped-up horizon scanning to inform priority action by the IASC over the 3-9 months period.

## Follow-up Actions

1. Update the IASC's strategic priorities to reflect discussions. [**IASC secretariat**]
2. Formalize the IASC Deputies Forum and clarify its role and scope of work. [**IASC secretariat**]
3. Closely consider the proposals for the future of the Results Groups and Reference Groups and advise on the recommended way forward. [**IASC Deputies Forum**]

## AOB and Closing

The ERC recalled the announcement of the establishment of IDP Protection Expert Group and thanked Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, in this regard.

The ERC concluded by thanking Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, who would be retiring shortly, for her dedicated service to address the extraordinary challenges facing women, children, and young people worldwide. He highlighted her creative flare, and her efforts to support, cooperate and collaborate closely with members.

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## List of participants:

1. Mr. Martin Griffiths, Chair and **Emergency Relief Coordinator**
2. Mr. Sean Callahan, President and Chief Executive Officer, **CRS**
3. Mr. Dominic MacSorley, Chief Executive Officer, **Concern Worldwide**
4. Mr. Qu Dongyu, Director General, **FAO** (*morning session*)
5. Mr. Paulsen Rein, Director, Office of Emergencies and Resilience, **FAO** (*afternoon sessions*)
6. Mr. Peter Maurer, President, **ICRC** (*morning session*)
7. Mr. Robert Mardini, Director General, **ICRC** (*afternoon sessions*)
8. Ms. Jane Backhurst, Chair of **ICVA** Board and Senior Adviser, Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy, Christian Aid
9. Mr. Ignacio Packer, Executive Director, **ICVA**
10. Mr. Sam Worthington, Chief Executive Officer, **InterAction**
11. Mr. Jagan Chapagain, Secretary General, **IFRC** (*Climate session*)
12. Mr. Xavier Castellanos, Under-Secretary General for National Society Development and Operations Coordination, **IFRC**
13. Mr. António Vitorino, Director-General, **IOM**
14. Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator a.i., **OCHA**
15. Mr. Mahamane Cisse-Gouro, Director, Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division, **OHCHR**
16. Ms. Abby Maxman, Chair of **SCHR** and President and Chief Executive Officer, Oxfam America
17. Ms. Maria Immonen, Vice Chair of **SCHR** and Director of the Lutheran World Federation



18. Mr. Gareth Price Jones, Executive Secretary, **SCHR**
19. Mr. Achim Steiner, Administrator, **UNDP**
20. Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, **UNFPA** (*afternoon sessions*)
21. Mr. Ib Petersen, Deputy Executive Director, **UNFPA** (*morning session*)
22. Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, **UN-Habitat**
23. Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees, **UNHCR**
24. Ms. Henrietta H. Fore, Executive Director, **UNICEF** (*afternoon sessions*)
25. Mr. Manuel Fontaine, Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, **UNICEF** (*morning session*)
26. Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, **UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons**
27. Mr. David Beasley, Executive Director, **WFP**
28. Dr. Tedros Adhanom, Director-General, **WHO**
29. Mr. Richard Damania, Chief Economist of the Sustainable Development Global Practice Group, **World Bank**
30. Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head, **IASC secretariat**